

NETWORKS

FAQ

Q What's the difference between a standard wireless router and an ADSL wireless router, and which do I need?

A A standard wireless router has an Ethernet WAN port that needs to be connected to an existing broadband modem. You'll need a broadband modem with an Ethernet port on it. Cable broadband (NTL and Telewest) provides these kinds of modems, and you'll have to use a standard wireless router if you want to share this kind of internet connection.

An ADSL wireless router has a built-in ADSL modem, so you can ditch your existing modem and plug the router directly into your phone line. They're a bit more expensive, as the ADSL modem costs more than a simple Ethernet port, but they're a good choice for ADSL users as all you need is a single box to share your internet connection.

David Ludlow
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TRENDNET 300Mbps Wireless N-Draft Firewall Router

★★★★

£62 inc VAT

TrendNet's 300Mbps Wireless N-Draft Firewall Router is the cheapest pre-N router we've reviewed. At just £62 including VAT, it's around the same price as a regular wireless router. It's not much to look at, though, as it uses TrendNet's typical cheap-looking blue plastic case. With three ugly aerials sticking out of the back, this is one router you're going to want to hide away in a cupboard.

In addition to wireless, the N-Draft also has four Ethernet ports and an Ethernet WAN port that needs to be connected to an existing broadband modem (ADSL or cable) to share your internet connection. Configuration of the router is through the web-based management, as the provided CD doesn't have a setup wizard, only the manual in PDF format. It's no trouble to do it using the web interface, though. TrendNet has two wizards: the first helps you configure your internet connection, and the second helps you set up your wireless settings. It's thorough, and the wireless wizard prompts you to turn on security.

We noticed the setup wizards are exactly the same as those on Zyxel's Prestige 336M reviewed opposite. However, that router is even easier to configure; it supports Microsoft's Windows Connect Now, which lets you configure your wireless settings on your PC and transfer them to your router using a USB flash drive. It isn't just the wizard that's the same, though: the whole interface is. This isn't a bad thing, as it's one of the better web interfaces we've used.

Setting up advanced settings such as virtual servers is easy. Just



select the kind of server you want to run – web, for example – and pick the PC it's running on from the drop-down list. You don't have to mess around typing in IP addresses and port numbers.

Performance is key, especially in a product that claims to have such a high throughput. Using our Centrino notebook, we were impressed, and we got some of the best throughputs we've seen. There was no drop-off at long range, showing it's a powerful router that should be able to cope with most homes. Sadly, performance using the supplied N-Draft PC Card wasn't very good, as you can see from the average performance shown below. The router wasn't consistent. We managed a throughput of 31.5Mbit/s

once, but this was rare and most throughputs were much lower. We manually changed the wireless settings, selecting our own channel and forcing the router to use just 802.11n, but unfortunately this made no difference.

As a pre-N router, the Wireless N-Draft Firewall Router isn't very good and you're better off buying D-Link's RangeBooster N 650 Router (see 'Also consider...' below). However, if you're looking for a fast 802.11g router, it's a good buy and has great throughputs.

David Ludlow

SUMMARY

✓ Excellent 802.11g throughput

✓ Inexpensive

✗ Poor 802.11n throughput

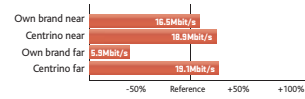
WIRELESS ROUTER Pre-802.11n wireless router (300Mbit/s), four Ethernet ports, one WAN port

PART CODE TEW-631BRP

SUPPLIER www.expansys.com

DETAILS www.trendnet.com

PERFORMANCE (see page 56)



Also consider...

DEVOLO DLAN 200 AVdesk Starter Kit

★★★★★

£147 inc VAT



Devolo's AVdesk Starter Kit comes with two HomePlug 200Mbit/s network adaptors that transmit data over your existing power lines.

They were very quick, with a throughput of 38.1Mbit/s coming close to pre-N wireless performance. If wireless is temperamental in your home, these network adaptors give you a fast, reliable alternative.



POWERLINE NETWORKING Two HomePlug AV Ethernet adaptors with Ethernet port **PART CODE** 1186 **SUPPLIER** www.broadbandbuyer.co.uk **DETAILS** www.devlo.co.uk Good value

Interfered with our wireless mouse **FULL REVIEW** Feb 2007

D-LINK RangeBooster N 650 Router

★★★★★

£83 inc VAT



The Draft-N RangeBooster router is incredibly easy to set up thanks to the Windows XP Connect Now system, which configures the router using USB. It's also very

quick, peaking at 42.4Mbit/s at close range when using a RangeBooster PC Card, which is easily enough for file sharing or streaming video. It's a great router and incredibly fast for the price.



WIRELESS ROUTER Pre-802.11n wireless router (300Mbit/s), four Ethernet ports, one WAN port, UPnP **PART CODE** DIR-635 **SUPPLIER** www.dabs.com **DETAILS** www.dlink.com Consistently fast, easy to set up No WEP support **FULL REVIEW** Nov 2006



D-LINK DI-524

★★★★

£36 inc VAT

D-Link's DI-524 is a standard 802.11g wireless router. It has four Ethernet ports for connecting wired clients and a WAN Ethernet port for connecting to a separate ADSL or Cable router.

It's configured using D-Link's Click 'n' Connect wizard, which runs from the provided CD. This takes you step-by-step through the installation. As well as showing you what to do, it has some built-in checks, such as making sure the WAN port is connected to a router. This ensures you don't make any simple errors that could stop your internet connection working. The wizard also guides you through configuring your wireless settings, including turning on security (WEP and WPA are supported). It's easy to follow, and we had our router set up in no time.

If you want to change any of the more advanced settings, you'll have to venture into the router's web-based management page. Settings such as making one of your PCs act as a server are tricky to configure, though. There's an advanced firewall you can use to configure specific rules. Again, you'll need to know exactly what you're doing before you change anything; the default firewall settings should provide enough protection for most people.

Performance was a little below that of our standard reference router. This router is fine for web browsing, but you'll want something faster for sharing files. The router's aerial is detachable, though, so you could replace it with a hi-gain model to increase your wireless range and throughput.

The DI-524 is cheap and does a good job if you're just looking to share a broadband connection for web surfing. However, Dynamode's BR-6004 W-G1, which we reviewed in *What's New: Networks*, *Shopper* December 2006, is faster and costs just £30 including VAT, even if it is a little bit trickier to set up.

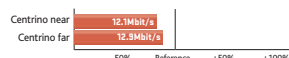
David Ludlow

SUMMARY

- ✓ Easy to set up
- ✓ Good value
- ✗ Quite slow

WIRELESS ROUTER 802.11g (54Mbit/s), four Ethernet ports, WAN port
PART CODE DI-524
SUPPLIER www.expansys.com
DETAILS www.dlink.co.uk

PERFORMANCE (see page 56)



ZYXEL Prestige 336M

★★★★

£78 inc VAT

ZyXel's Prestige 336M is a MIMO wireless router, so you'll get better throughputs and distances when you use it with matching wireless adaptors. It's also WiFi certified, so it's guaranteed to work with your existing WiFi kit, such as Centrino notebooks. It has four Ethernet ports for wired clients and a WAN Ethernet port that connects to an ADSL or Cable modem.

This is only the second router we've seen to use Windows Connect Now. Provided you have Windows XP Service Pack 2, you can first configure your wireless network on your PC and then transfer the settings via a USB key to other computers and your router. It certainly makes setting up the wireless network simple.

You still need to use the router's web-based management page to configure your broadband connection. Fortunately, there's a wizard that takes you through all the settings, so you'll soon be online. You might also want to change the wireless settings, too, as the defaults aren't very good. For example, the automatic wireless configuration picked a congested channel, so we manually changed it to use channel 11 instead.

The web-based management isn't much to look at, but we were impressed with how easy it made certain things. If you want to run your own server, you just pick the service you want to run from a drop-down menu and the PC on which it's running from another menu.

Performance was just below average when we used our Centrino notebook. Switching to ZyXel's Mimo PC Card adaptor (£54) got much better results, but not as quick as we've seen from other MIMO routers. It's not a bad router, but it's expensive, especially for a router without ADSL built in. If you want a fast cable router, D-Link's RangeBooster N 650 Router in our 'Also Consider...' is a better choice.

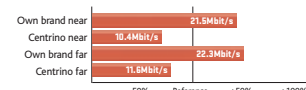
David Ludlow

SUMMARY

- ✓ Windows Connect Now
- ✓ Easy to configure internet services
- ✗ Expensive

WIRELESS ROUTER 802.11g (108Mbit/s turbo mode), four Ethernet ports, one WAN port
PART CODE P-336m
SUPPLIER <http://uk.insight.com>
DETAILS www.zyxel.co.uk

PERFORMANCE (see page 56)



US ROBOTICS Cordless Skype Dual Phone

★★★★★

£59 inc VAT



US Robotics' Cordless Skype Dual Phone plugs into your PC and phone line so you can make regular landline and cheap internet calls from one DECT handset. The kit comes with a base station that plugs into your PC and your standard landline, and a docking station that charges your handset.

We suspect this kit is made by Philips, as Philips' VolP3211S dual Skype phone makes exactly the same sound as the Cordless Skype Dual Phone when it's plugged into the dock. Both phones have an identical key layout, too, although US Robotics has gone for a boxier look. Installation is easy, and a setup wizard tells you how to connect the necessary cables and installs the driver software on your PC. It also configures Skype to make and receive calls using the Skype Dual Phone.

Making a call is easy. The dedicated Skype button pulls your contact list from your PC and displays an icon next to each entry to show your contacts' status. The screen has a very low resolution, so the icons don't look great, but they're easy enough to read. If you want to dial a normal telephone number using SkypeOut, simply enter the telephone number and hit the Skype button. The phone's menu also lets you access your Skype Voicemail and view, but not top up, SkypeOut credits.

Landline calls are made the same way as on a normal DECT phone. Each handset can store 50 telephone numbers, plus you can store 10 shared numbers on the base station. These numbers can be accessed by additional Skype Dual Phone handsets associated with the same base station. Over a landline, call quality was excellent; using Skype, there was the usual distortion we'd expect, but it was still clear.

The Dual Phone is very well made with large responsive keys. It's great value, too, and an excellent choice if you want to be able to switch easily between your landline and Skype.

David Ludlow

SUMMARY

- ✓ Easy to use
- ✓ Well made
- ✗ Low-resolution screen

SKYPE PHONE Docking station, base station, USB and landline connection, 60 number address book (50 on phone and 10 on base station), 120 hours' standby time, 10 hours' talk time
PART CODE USR019630
SUPPLIER www.expansys.com
DETAILS www.usr.com